Rules of the Game
Animals (Part Four)
By Skip Williams

Last week, we completed our long look at the tricks an animal can perform on a character's behalf. This week, we consider animal companions.

From page 36 of the *Player's Handbook*:

THE DRUID'S ANIMAL COMPANION

A druid's animal companion is superior to a normal animal of its kind and has special powers, as described below.

Class Level	Bonus HD	Natural Armor Adj.	Str/Dex Adj.	Bonus Tricks	Special
1st-2nd	+0	+0	+0	1	Link, share spells
3rd-5th	+2	+2	+1	2	Evasion
6th-8th	+4	+4	+2	3	Devotion
9th-11th	+6	+6	+3	4	Multiattack
12th-14th	+8	+8	+4	5	
15th-17th	+10	+10	+5	6	Improved evasion
18th-20th	+12	+12	+6	7	

Animal Companion Basics: Use the base statistics for a creature of the companion's kind, as given in the *Monster Manual,* but make the following changes.

Class Level: The character's druid level. The druid's class levels stack with levels of any other classes that are entitled to an animal companion (such as the ranger) for the purpose of determining the companion's abilities and the alternative lists available to the character.

Bonus HD: Extra eight-sided (d8) Hit Dice, each of which gains a Constitution modifier, as normal. Remember that extra Hit Dice improve the animal companion's base attack and base save bonuses. An animal companion's base attack bonus is the same as that of a druid of a level equal to the animal's HD. An animal companion has good Fortitude and Reflex saves (treat it as a character whose level equals the animal's HD). An animal companion gains additional skill points and feats for bonus HD as normal for advancing a monster's Hit Dice (see the *Monster Manual*).

Natural Armor Adj.: The number noted here is an improvement to the animal companion's existing natural armor bonus.

Str/Dex Adj.: Add this value to the animal companion's Strength and Dexterity scores.

Bonus Tricks: The value given in this column is the total number of "bonus" tricks that the animal knows in addition to any that the druid might choose to teach it (see the Handle Animal skill, page 74). These bonus tricks don't require any training time or Handle Animal checks, and they don't count against the normal limit of tricks known by the animal. The druid selects these bonus tricks, and once selected, they can't be changed.

Link (Ex): A druid can handle her animal companion as a free action, or push it as a move action, even if she doesn't have any ranks in the Handle Animal skill. The druid gains a +4 circumstance bonus on all wild empathy checks and Handle Animal checks made regarding an animal companion.

Share Spells (Ex): At the druid's option, she may have any spell (but not any spell-like ability) she casts upon herself also affect her animal companion. The animal companion must be within 5 feet of her at the time of casting to receive the benefit. If the spell or effect has a duration other than instantaneous, it stops affecting the animal companion if the companion moves farther than 5 feet away and will not affect the animal again, even if it returns to the druid before the duration expires. Additionally, the druid may cast a spell with a target of "You" on her animal companion (as a touch range spell) instead of on herself. A druid and her animal companion can share spells even if the spells normally do not affect creatures of the companion's type (animal).

Evasion (Ex): If an animal companion is subjected to an attack that normally allows a Reflex saving throw for half damage, it takes no damage if it makes a successful saving throw.

Devotion (Ex): An animal companion's devotion to its master is so complete that it gains a +4 morale bonus on Will saves against enchantment spells and effects.

Multiattack: An animal companion gains Multiattack as a bonus feat if it has three or more natural attacks (see the *Monster Manual* for details on this feat) and does not already have that feat. If it does not have the requisite three or more natural attacks, the animal companion instead gains a second attack with its primary natural weapon, albeit at a -5 penalty.

Improved Evasion (Ex): When subjected to an attack that normally allows a Reflex saving throw for half damage, an animal companion takes no damage if it makes a successful saving throw and only half damage if the saving throw fails.

Animal Companion Basics

The animal companion class feature gives you an animal to serve you and accompany you on your adventures. The animal is pretty much just like any other creature of its kind, but its status as an animal companion gives it several exceptional features and traits.

- The sidebar on page 36 in the *Player's Handbook* shows potential animal companions and their special abilities.

Your class and class level determines the kind of animal you can choose, as shown in your class description. Some animal companion traits, however, remain the same no matter what your level. Here's an overview:

An animal companion remains an animal.

Early versions of the *Player's Handbook* said that animal companions become magical beasts. According to the

errata files, however, animal companions are merely animals.

- You can handle your animal companion as a free action, and you do it very well.

The link special ability, which is available to anyone who has an animal companion, allows you to give your animal a command as a free action if you order it to use a trick it knows. You can push your companion (see Part One) as a move action. You also gain a +4 circumstance bonus on any Handle Animal or wild empathy check you make regarding your animal companion. Otherwise, commanding an animal companion works just like commanding a trained animal, as described in Part One.

- You can share spells with your animal companion.

You decide when spells are shared. To share a spell, you must cast the spell and you must select yourself as its target. The spell must have a target entry; you cannot share effect and area spells. See *Rules of the Game: Reading Spell Descriptions* for a discussion of targets, effects, and areas. You can't share a spell with touch range unless you target yourself with the touch.

You and your animal companion can share a spell even if the spell normally does not affect animals. The shared spell does not have to be a divine spell; you can share any spell you cast yourself with your animal companion. You cannot share spell-like abilities or supernatural abilities, even if you can target them on yourself. You and your animal companion can share effects from magic items only if the effect is a spell that you can target on yourself. For example, you and your animal companion can share a *barkskin* spell cast from a wand, but cannot share the armor bonus from *bracers of armor*.

To share a spell, your animal companion must be within 5 feet of you and there must be an unbroken line of effect between you and the companion. If the shared spell has a duration other than instantaneous, your animal companion must remain with 5 feet of you and maintain an unbroken line of effect to you or lose the spell's benefits. Once your animal companion loses the benefits from a particular casting of a spell, it cannot regain them again.

When you and your animal companion share a spell, you're effectively adding one free target (your animal companion) to the spell's effect. In simple cases, the spell just affects both of you in the same way. For example, when you share a *cure light wounds* spell with your animal companion, the spell provides healing equal to 1d8 + your caster level for both you and for your animal companion. A shared *spider climb* spell gives both you and your animal companion the power to climb sheer, smooth surfaces. A shared *protection from energy* spell provides a separate ablative shield against the chosen energy type to you and to your animal companion.

Some spells don't work quite as simply as these, but the effect of sharing them with your animal companion is usually pretty intuitive. For example, if you cast *word of recall,* your animal companion doesn't count toward the limit of transported creatures (regardless of its size). Likewise, if you share a *transport via plants* spell with your animal companion, the companion doesn't count toward the spell's weight limit. If you share a *water breathing* spell with your animal companion, the companion gains the same duration of effect as you do, but it isn't counted as one of the creatures touched for the purpose of dividing the total duration.

Some spells require special handling when shared. See *Rules of the Game: All About Polymorph* for an example.

You also have the option of casting any spell with a target of "you" on your animal companion as a spell with touch range. If you do so, you do not share the effect with the companion, but your animal companion retains the spell's benefits for as long as the spell lasts no matter where the companion goes after you cast the spell.

- The animal companion learns a bonus trick.

You don't have to make a check or spend any time training the companion. Once you select the bonus trick, you cannot change it later.

Level-Based Benefits

An animal companion gains several traits that depend on your level in the class that gives you the companion. If you have more than one class that can give you an animal companion, add your class levels together to determine what animals are available to you as animal companions and what your animal companion's abilities are. (You don't gain an animal companion for each class.) You might not be able to add all your class levels together to generate an animal companion. For example, the ranger's animal companion class feature uses the same particulars as the druid's animal companion class feature, but the ranger's effective class level for his animal companion is only one half his ranger level. A druid/ranger uses his druid level plus one half his ranger level for all his animal companion's level-related variables.

Here's an overview of an animal companion's level-based benefits:

- Bonus Hit Dice.

The animal companion gains extra Hit Dice as noted in the table on page 36 of the *Player's Handbook.* The companion gains the full benefit from increased Hit Dice, including increased base attack, base saves, skill points, and feats. The animal companion, however, does not increase in size (any more than you do when adding Hit Dice for your class levels).

- Natural armor increase.

Add the value shown on the table to the companion's normal natural armor bonus. For example, a standard wolf's natural armor bonus is +2. A wolf animal companion with a 5th-level master has a natural armor bonus of +4.

This trait doesn't simply provide an extra natural armor bonus, it actually improves the companion's racial natural armor bonus. Additional natural armor bonuses from items or spells, such as *amulets of natural armor* or *barkskin* spells stack with the natural armor bonus from this trait, as noted in their descriptions.

The natural armor bonus from this trait increases with your level, as shown on the table. The companion gets the benefit of this trait for as long as it remains a companion.

- Strength and Dexterity increases.

Add the value shown on the table to the companion's Strength and Dexterity scores. For example, a standard wolf has a Strength score of 13 and a Dexterity score of 15. A wolf animal companion with a 5th-level master has a Strength score of 14 and a Dexterity score of 16.

As with natural armor, this is an outright increase to Strength and Dexterity, not a bonus.

- Bonus tricks.

The animal companion learns additional tricks. As noted earlier, you don't need to teach your companion its bonus tricks. Once you choose a bonus trick, you cannot change it.

- Evasion.

If your effective class level for the animal companion class feature is at least 3rd (for example, you are a 3rd-level druid or a 6th-level ranger), your animal companion gains the evasion special quality. If the companion is subjected to an attack that normally allows a Reflex saving throw for half damage, the companion takes no damage if it makes a successful saving throw.

- Devotion.

If your effective class level for the animal companion class feature is at least 6th, your animal companion gains a +4 morale bonus on Will saves against enchantment spells and effects.

Essentially, your animal companion becomes so devoted to you that others have a hard time establishing mental control over the companion.

- Multiattack.

If your effective class level for the animal companion class feature is at least 9th, your animal companion gains Multiattack as a bonus feat if it doesn't already have it. The companion must have three or more natural weapons (for example, two claws and a bite) to gain Multiattack. If the companion does not have the requisite three natural weapons, it instead gains a second natural attack with its primary natural weapon at a -5 penalty. The companion must use the full attack action to get the second attack (just as it must to use more than one natural weapon).

For example, a wolf animal companion with a 9th-level master has 8 Hit Dice (2 racial Hit Dice and 6 bonus Hit Dice), a base attack bonus of +6, and a Strength score of 16 (base 13 increased by 3). The wolf companion attack bonus with its bite is +9 (+6 base, +3 Strength). Because a wolf has only one natural weapon (its bite), the wolf gains a second bite attack when it uses the full attack action. The attack bonus for this second attack is +4 (9 - 5).

- Improved evasion.

If your effective class level for the animal companion class feature is at least 15th, your animal companion gains the improved evasion special quality. If the companion is subjected to an attack that normally allows a Reflex saving throw for half damage, the animal takes no damage if it makes a successful saving throw and half damage even if the saving throw fails.

Acquiring an Animal Companion

The rules speak of a ceremony to gain an animal companion, but they do not go into much detail about the process other than noting that the ceremony takes 24 hours of uninterrupted prayer. Here are a few thoughts to flesh out the process.

An animal companion is not a conjured creature and is not subject to effects, such as *protection from evil* or *dismissal,* that banish or hedge out conjured creatures. Think of it as binding an animal companion rather than summoning it. To begin, you must first locate the kind of creature you desire. The prospective companion cannot be an advanced animal, nor can it be another character's animal companion or another character's familiar. It also can't have a template, even if that template doesn't change its type. Awakened animals can never serve as animal companions. The animal you choose must be of a kind your class makes available to you as an animal companion.

You can use any convenient means to locate your intended companion. Because most animal companions aren't the kind you can find in a shop, finding the animal you want probably requires a trip into the wild and a few Survival or Knowledge (nature) checks.

After locating the companion, you must arrange to keep the animal nearby for the day-long ritual that binds the two of you together. Lucky masters choose companions that are friendly enough to stick around on their own , but sometimes you must tether or cage it to keep it from wandering off.

The ritual does not succeed unless the intended companion is friendly toward you (but a wild empathy check can solve that problem). The ritual also does not succeed if the intended companion is under any charm or compulsion effect.

You can have only one animal companion at a time and an animal can have only one master at time. You can, however, have both an animal companion and a familiar if your class levels give you both class features.

The ritual itself can take any form the DM desires; however, a few gestures, chants, and perhaps some drawings sketched on the floor around the pair of you -- all repeated at intervals throughout the day -- are all that are necessary.

Dismissing an Animal Companion

Sometimes, a character may want to rid herself of an animal companion, usually because the companion has suffered some debilitating injury or because a more desirable animal becomes available as a companion. To dismiss an animal companion, you simply will it so, though breaking the link that binds the two of you is a full-round action.

You suffer no penalties for dismissing an animal companion (other than the necessity of finding and binding a new animal companion). Immediately on being dismissed, the animal loses all animal companion abilities and becomes a normal creature of its kind. It suffers no other ill effects. You are free to bind a new animal companion as soon as you have the opportunity to do so.

Death of an Animal Companion

When an animal companion dies, the master doesn't suffer any penalties beyond the loss of the companion and she can bind a new one right away, as noted above.

Bringing back the animal from the dead reestablishes the link between the two of you, and you need not locate or bind a new companion; however, the *reincarnate* spell is an exception. The spell brings back the animal as an independent being and the resulting creature is no longer an animal companion.

Death of a Master

If you die, and your animal companion survives, it is effectively dismissed. As a house rule, you might want to delay the companion's loss of abilities for a short time, say one day for each character level you have.

If you are later brought back from the dead, the link between you and your surviving animal companion is reestablished automatically.

Animal Companions and Magic Items

A great way to both protect your companion and perhaps give it some offensive power is to equip it with magic items. Consider purchasing items for your companion or just give it items you no longer need (such as your *+1 ring of protection* when you acquire a *+2 ring of protection*).

Once you do so, however, you and your DM face a potentially difficult decision. Exactly which items can animals use? Since most magic items fit users of any size, the simple answer is this: pretty much any item. No animal companion can use an item that requires spell completion or spell knowledge because they are not spellcasters. Likewise animals cannot speak, so they can't use command word items. Animals also lack weapon proficiencies and prehensile appendages, so they cannot employ weapons, either. That leaves us with the following: potions (though you may have to open the potion vial and pour out the liquid), rings, and most items that can be worn or carried. Your DM may decide that your companion's body type simply does not allow some items to fit your companion. For example, you might persuade your DM to let your wolf wear boots, but don't count on your snake wearing boots. Creatures like owls and hawks may have a hard time with cloaks (since the garment interferes with their wings).

Other than the exceptions noted here, all animals have locations for magic items similar to those noted for characters on page 214 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide.* For example, a quadruped uses its back feet for the "foot" location and its front feet for the "hand" location. The hind legs correspond to a humanoid's legs and the front legs correspond to a humanoid's arms.

For avians, treat the feet and legs as hands and arms, and the wings as legs and feet. The creature can wear "leg" items on its wings or hind legs, but not both.

A snake simply wears items over its head or body.

In most cases, even if your companion can't use an item you've found, it should be possible to make (or have made) an item it can use. For example, you might fashion *wing bands of speed* for your owl's or hawk's wings, and they would work just like *boots of speed* for your companion.

For an in-depth look at what items an animal can use or wear, check out Wild Life.

Animal Companions as Beings

Other than the special traits noted earlier, an animal companion acts just like a well-trained loyal animal, no smarter or more capable than any other creature of its kind (except for the improvements your class levels bring). An animal companion identity is strongly linked to you, however, and the two of you form a sort of dual being. The animal companion cannot gain experience or add any class levels on its own.

Likewise, an animal companion is an extension of you, and you and your companion do not split or share any experience points you earn even when the companion helps you earn that experience.

In Conclusion

That wraps up our look at animals. I hope that you find the material on this topic helpful when you next sit down at the gaming table.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon* *Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual.* When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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